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SUBJECT: MGKV01: CROATIA WAITING FOR "CRITICAL MASS" OF EU STATES BEFORE MOVING AHEAD WITH KOSOVO RECOGNITION

REF: STATE 16319

Classified By: Rick Holtzapple, POL/ECON, Reasons 1.4 B/D

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador spoke with Croatian FM Gordan Jandrokovic and Presidential Advisor Budimir Loncar on February 18 to urge close cooperation with the US and EU at the UNSC, and speedy Croatian recognition of Kosovo. Both pledged that Croatia would continue to cooperate closely in the UNSC. They also both reiterated the long-standing Croatian position that Croatia would recognize Kosovo shortly after the US and the key EU states. The FM noted that Croatia was watching closely to see which and how many EU states recognize, and Loncar specifically mentioned the case of Slovenia. Loncar also said that the GoC wanted to give the Serbs a couple of days to deal with the independence aftermath, and thought this could mean Croatian recognition might wait until the week of Feb. 25.

¶2. (C) PolCouns spoke on February 19 with Assistant Foreign Minister Neven Pelicaric. He said the GoC has the paperwork for recognition all prepared, and there is "no doubt in our minds" that Croatia will recognize Kosovo soon. He recalled that Croatian PermRep Jurica had stated this at the UNSC session on February 17. But the GoC is waiting for a "critical mass" of EU Member States to have announced recognition before proceeding. Pelicaric defined that as 15 to 18 EU states. He had hoped the EU would be at that point by February 19, and indicated that the GoC's plan had been for Prime Minister Sanader to consult with President Mesic this week, and for the GoC to take the decision at the scheduled session of the government on February 21. The Croatians had been a bit surprised, he commented, at the reports they had received about how "nasty" some of the debate at the EU's GAERC meeting on February 18 had been. But after consultations with representatives of the relevant EU states (Dutch, Danes, Austria, etc.) he thought the EU would reach Croatia's comfort level by the end of the week. In any case, Pelicaric added, he did not expect the GoC to drag the decision out, as it "would be counterproductive to wait too long."

¶3. (C) Pelicaric stressed that once enough EU states had recognized for Croatia to be prepared to proceed, the recognition decision could be taken at a quickly convened special session of the government, with no need to wait for the formal weekly session of the government. No additional steps would be needed, the recognition would take effect immediately. He said he expected that shortly thereafter, PM Sanader would initiate an exchange of letters with PM Thaci to establish relations, and to upgrade the current Croatian office in Pristina to a diplomatic mission.

¶4. (U) In an additional effort to prepare the Croatian public

(and any Serbian readership) for the GoC's decision, President Mesic published a lengthy op-ed on February 16 laying out the factors influencing Croatia's position. After a complex presentation of Kosovo's legal status as a province of the former Yugoslavia, Mesic said Croatia's decisions would be determined by the facts that Kosovo is a unique case, that a return to the previous situation is impossible, and the status quo was unsustainable. Croatia's responsibility, he concludes is "to help Kosovo along the first steps in its new life" and "to help Serbia in facing new circumstances and in finding its own place in the global community."

15. (C) COMMENT: The Croatians remain committed to proceeding with recognition, and will do so shortly after the large majority of the EU have already done so. But they remain nervous about being singled out by Serbia for retaliation. Local media have featured reports that President Tadic specifically criticized Croatia's position at the UNSC debate and comments by Serb Radical Party leader Nikolic threatening that if Croatia did not respect Serbia's "territorial integrity" then it could not expect Serbia to respect Croatia's own borders. Given this nervousness, the Croatians are reluctant to act until they are sure there is a large EU majority ahead of them. END COMMENT.
WALKER